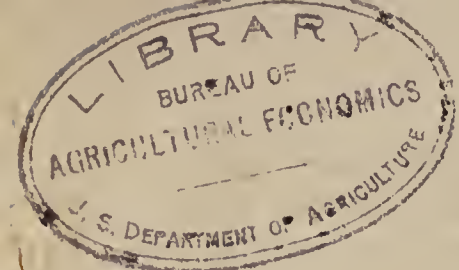


Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



MAR 20 1937

1142
N76R

THE 1937 FARM PROGRAM IN THE NORTHEAST

A radio talk by DeWitt Wing, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, broadcast Monday, March 15, 1937, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by 59 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

---ooOoo---

My observation is that a national policy, with a flexible, regionalized program, for agriculture goes a long way toward keeping farmers in each region of the country posted on what farmers in other regions are doing and why they are doing it. I want to tell you something about what farmers are doing in the northeast states. In order to reduce the cost of producing milk, they are increasing grass and hay production by building up their soils. One of their leaders, a practical farmer, says that "for the first time in their lives northeast dairymen are fully aware that their greatest natural asset is the grass crop; that their pastures are better fed and maintained than ever before; and that in their hay crop more digestible nutrients and a higher percentage of protein to the acre are grown."

Last year's agricultural conservation program enabled a substantial percentage of farmers in the northeast to extend the improvement of their grass and hay lands. Some of these men and many of their neighbors are going along with this year's program. Soil-building practices, encouraged by the program, were adopted on a number of old, sour, impoverished farms that I have seen in the region. When I was on one of these farms last fall, the visible results were definite and impressive, in spite of the fact that the year's rainfall was below normal for the locality. It was plain as day that a new seeding of clovers and timothy, with oats as a nurse crop, had done well on a 12-acre field. After it was plowed and harrowed, this field received an application of a ton of lime, 500 pounds of superphosphate and 100 pounds of muriate of potash to the acre.

Both the soil treatment and the seed mixture were recommended by the agricultural college people in the farmer's state. He says that the soil-building program produced "a surprising growth of good feed for grazing." About 70 years ago this farm, which lies nearly a half-mile above sea level, produced fair to good crops of corn, oats, buckwheat and rye, and its meadows and pastures maintained many cattle, horses and sheep. Farms like it in the same county once supported families who lived well and reared sons and daughters who transferred their talents to cities and towns.

This man's expressed belief is that northeast farmers who adopt the program can take a long step, even in one year, toward building up much of their hillside pasture and hay land. "While the job is under way", he says, "a part of the expense can be met by returns from livestock produced on the land." Last fall his lambs made extra gains on the green feed in a field to which the soil-building treatment was applied.

About \$10.50 an acre is the cash cost of soil-building as this man is doing it, and of that sum about two-thirds will be paid to him under the terms of the program, if he earns it in accordance with the prescribed conditions.

(over)

Preparing stony, hill land for new seedings of pasture and meadow grasses, and hauling and applying fertilizers and lime are hard, expensive work, but he will continue the job that he has long wanted to do but could not afford to undertake until this program and the new farm to market road work made it possible.

Gully and surface washing has occurred on this man's land, and mowing and grazing have further reduced its productive value. Tilled crops were grown on most of it for many years after it was cleared. Northeast farmers have not diverted much land to pasture until it was too poor for the profitable production of tilled crops. Located as they are in a favorable climate for adapted agricultural plants, the old grass and hay lands of the northeast make a prompt and often remarkable response to soil-building treatment. Many hilly farms of the region, however, are so inaccessible that they were abandoned 30 to 50 years ago for crop production. Houses and barns on these farms remained unoccupied until 1931 and '32, when thousands of city families were forced to get out and seek rural living quarters. No small part of this wandering horde rented and moved into these old houses, where they are still living.

Much of the hilly land which passed out of tilled crop production long ago is being reforested and renewed in nature's slow way; most of the remainder is covered with brush and trees. Wind-swept hilltops, cleared and tilled in the last century, are thinly covered with golden rod, hawk weed and the like. Some of the best of the old meadows are mowed by hill farmers who keep some livestock and poultry, the land-owners getting a third to a half of the hay in the stack. Big tracts of such land have been publicly or privately reforested. To land of this description, the agricultural conservation program does not apply.

America has used, wasted or destroyed much more than the bulk of its merchantable lumber and timber wealth, and the loss of trees in hill and rolling land has had serious consequences to agriculture. For the functional value of trees to man, historically and now, can hardly be over-emphasized.

During about 60 years in particular, preceding 1933, there was no widespread active consciousness of the soil as a basic, living resource which could be worn, weakened, soured, washed away, blown loose, and widely scattered. Many a farmer drew heavily on the fertility of his best fields in order to pay off a mortgage or buy more land. Everywhere in the nation it was the habit and the practice of both farmers and stockmen every year to produce to the limit on all suitable land that they controlled and could operate; and, having no organized bargaining power, they sold their products for whatever they could get. What happened, therefore, was that the nation's soil fertility was farmed out and cashed on a prodigal scale, and an enormous wash-off and loss of valuable top soil occurred.

Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace said recently that "a permanent policy of conservation of soil resources has been laid down and a start has been made in applying it." Encouraged by this policy, farmers throughout the nation are increasing their income by acting together in taking care of their land. In doing this job in their own interest, they are strengthening the nation at its roots. Much time and energy will be required to preserve the existing agricultural capacity of the nation, and to increase that capacity will take much more; but the task has begun and it will continue, changing with changing conditions, but adhering to principles that agricultural science and practice have established. Applied as they are on a national scale, these principles bring the healing and protective forces of nature into cooperation with farmers in building up and taking care of the land and the nation.